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**How (Not) to “Hollaback”:**

**Towards a Transnational Debate on the “Red Zora” and  
Militant Tactics in the Feminist Struggle Against Gender  
Based Violence**

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## **How (Not) to “Hollaback”: Towards a Transnational Debate on the “Red Zora” and Militant Tactics in the Feminist Struggle Against Gender Based Violence**

**Abstract:** The Red Zora was formed in the mid-1970s as a subgroup within the militant leftist network Revolutionary Cells. Like other militant leftist groups in West Germany, the Red Zora deemed the use of physical force against property, and in some cases people, to be a necessary part of national and international political interventions. But the group had a radical feminist philosophy. Between 1977 and 1995, the Red Zora carried out dozens of attacks with an explicitly feminist agenda. This paper gives a brief overview of the activities of the Red Zora and of feminist responses to the group. Against the background of Germany’s fascist past and political violence in the FRG, feminist activists in Germany were understandably reluctant to discuss ideas and activities that could associate the women’s movement with left-wing “terrorism”. This article shows that “Hollaback!”, #aufschrei and other recent campaigns by feminist activists in Germany have reinforced rather than challenged the feminist silence on the Red Zora. While German feminists have only begun to document the history of the group, activists in other countries show that one does not have to agree with the tactics of the Red Zora to productively engage with the activities of this group.

**Keywords:** Red Zora, Hollaback, West German feminism, sexualised violence, political violence.

In the 1970s, violence against women became a central topic in feminist circles. In West Germany, to create awareness for and mobilize against gender based violence, feminist activists set up a range of local projects and national campaigns, including advice centres, women's shelters, self-defence courses, petitions and creative street protests. While feminists across the political spectrum condemned violence against women and girls, the question how broadly violence had to be defined to tackle visible and invisible forms of abuse was the subject of vivid debate in the New Women's Movement in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The development of the German women's movement was, as Ute Gerhard highlights, no "continuous process", but "a history of repeated setbacks, stagnation and of many new beginnings under constantly changing social and political circumstances" (Gerhard 2008, 191). The term "New Women's Movement" indicates that the feminist groups and networks that emerged in the late 1960s in the context of the anti-authoritarian student movement marked such a new beginning. Inspired by the theoretical framework and anti-authoritarian spirit of the New Left, the New Women's Movement developed structures and a political agenda that differed considerably from those of feminist movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Silies 2011, 94). Even more controversial than definitions of patriarchal violence was the question as to which forms of feminist protest were necessary and legitimate in the fight against gender-based violence. As this article shows, sexualised violence remains an important issue in the New Women's Movement, and has been a central topic in online feminist campaigns in the FRG.

In the 1970s, West Germany saw a wave of violent attacks carried out by the Red Army Faction (RAF) and other militant leftist groups, to which the state responded with drastic counter-terrorism measures. With the “German Autumn” in 1977, the violent conflict between the RAF and the West German State reached a dramatic peak. In September 1977, group members abducted the business executive Hanns-Martin Schleyer to enforce the release of the detained RAF founding members, and in early October, Palestinian fighters hijacked a German airplane to increase the pressure on state and police authorities. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, however, categorically rejected the demands of the kidnappers. Shortly after special forces had stormed the airplane and liberated all hostages, the detained RAF leaders Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan Carl Raspe were found dead in their prison cells on the morning of 18 October (for a detailed discussion, see Hanshew 2012, 192ff). On the same day, Schleyer was killed by his kidnappers after a forty-four-day long ordeal. Despite this crushing defeat, a new generation of RAF fighters emerged in the 1980s, and the RAF “maintained a consistent political presence in West German public debates” up until today (Melzer 2009, 55).<sup>i</sup>

After the German Autumn, many feminist activists in West Germany took the stance that only non-violent forms of protest could achieve real social change. Nevertheless, more than a few groups and individuals in the New Women’s Movement acknowledged that women could find themselves in situations in which they had to use violence to defend themselves against violent attacks (e.g. rape attempts). In the eyes of the militant feminist group “Red Zora” (RZ) and a few other feminists in West Germany, the use of defensive violence did not go far enough: they considered violent tactics imperative to overcome oppression and exploitation on a local and global scale.

Between 1977 and 1988, the Red Zora claimed responsibility for forty-five arson attacks and bombings, most of which took place in the 1980s, and a few more followed in the 1990s. Many of these attacks took up central themes in West German feminism including violence against women, transnational solidarity, as well as issues around population control, reproductive technologies and genetic engineering. With these attacks, the RZ tried to encourage women and girls to form gangs to fight back against the many forms of violence and abuse that they experienced in their everyday lives. “Our dream”, explained two group members in an interview with the feminist magazine EMMA in 1984, “is that there are small gangs of women everywhere; and that a rapist, women trafficker, wife beater, porn dealer, creepy gynaecologist must fear that a gang of women finds him, attacks him, and humiliates him in public” (Die Rote Zora 1984, 41).<sup>ii</sup>

While the overwhelming majority of RZ attacks targeted property, there was at least one exception. In the early 1980s, members of the Red Zora forced Detlef K., who was — according to them — a notorious trafficker of women, to pose naked for a photograph. It is not known how the group took the photograph, but the only surviving copy of the claim of responsibility suggests that Detlef K. did not pose voluntarily for the photograph.<sup>iii</sup> Around his neck was a sign that read, mimicking the style of his own newspaper advertisements, “woman trafficker — sweet, affectionate — to be used at any time, with toad-cock [Krötenpimmel]”. In the statement, the Red Zora declared that they did not want to tolerate any longer that white men sold and bought women from the so-called Third World as if they were commodities. The militant feminist pamphlet concluded as follows: “We will put up resistance against all woman traffickers, rapists, and shitty machos and against the imperialist,

misogynist system for as long as we can think and feel!!” (Stasi Archiv Berlin, MfS HA XXII 5216/8, 288-289).

Given that trafficking was an important topic in the German women’s movement, it is interesting that the attack against Detlef K. and most other activities of the Red Zora received little attention in feminist circles. With the exception of Ilse Lenz (2010), feminist historians of the German women’s movement have ignored the group (see, e.g. Schlaeger and Vedder-Shults 1978; Altbach 1984; Frevert 1986; Haug 1986; Schulz 2004; Marx-Ferree 2012). There are many reasons for the feminist silence on the Red Zora. State and police authorities still know very little about the structure and activities of the group, and former members and sympathisers of the RZ have been anxious not to reveal information that could incriminate themselves or others. As a result, many feminists today are simply not aware of the fact that the group existed. Another reason why the Red Zora attracted little attention is that militant tactics have played a marginal role in feminist struggles in this Germany. For this reason, many feminist historians consider the activities of the RZ simply not relevant enough to deserve a place in the history of the German women’s movement. Ideological differences are a third reason why feminists ignore the Red Zora: many German feminists consider violent protest irreconcilable with feminist politics. The aim of this paper is not to adjudicate whether violent protest can be compatible with feminist ethics. Rather it provides one of the first scholarly discussions of the Red Zora and seeks to explore what role the group plays in feminist struggles today.

### **Feminism and Silence**

In the Western tradition, silence has been associated with absence, passivity and powerlessness. This association “presumes a political imperative: for an

individual or group who is silenced to gain power, they must activate voice in order to resist and transform the conditions of their oppression” (Malhotra and Carillo Rowe 2013, 1). In line with this reasoning, it became a central concern of feminist activists to make women’s voices heard. To work towards this aim, feminist researchers have critically examined obvious and hidden power structures that marginalise and silence women in patriarchal societies, and they have documented and analysed the voices and experiences of women across the globe.

In 2005, a group of three men and four women in New York started the online campaign “Hollaback!” to document, map and tackle street harassment. According to the Hollaback website, the movement is now active in the US and in 25 other countries. In January 2011, the feminist activists Julia Brilling and Claudia Johann set up the website Hollaback Berlin, which became a platform for personal testimonies, information on and campaigns against street harassment in and beyond the German capital. The two women state on the website that they have joined the movement because they wanted to find non-violent forms of resistance against the “culture of silence” [die Kultur des Schweigens] surrounding sexualised violence in Germany. Modelled closely on the American pilot project, the Hollaback Berlin website does not comment on the history of feminist protest against sexualised violence in Germany. Whilst helping women to speak up against street harassment and sexual abuse, Hollaback Germany reinforces the feminist silence on the Red Zora. A similar conclusion can be drawn about the feminist twitter campaign “#aufschrei”.

In January 2013, feminist activist Anne Wizorek started a twitter campaign against sexualised violence and street harassment in contemporary German society. Tens of thousands of women followed her suggestion and used the hashtag “aufschrei” [outcry/scream/shouting back] to tweet about experiences of harassment



and sexual abuse. Soon, the media began to report on the campaign, and it sparked a broader debate on sexism and sexualised violence. What distinguishes Wizorek's initiative from previous campaigns is not only her effective use of social media, but also her casual language. In her book Weil ein #aufschrei nicht genug ist. Für einen Feminismus von heute [Why #shoutingback is not enough. For a new feminism], she makes an urgent appeal: "If you're fed up with discrimination and you want to help to change this society, you have to break your silence and get your butt in gear" (Wizorek 2014, 229).<sup>iv</sup> As the quote illustrates, Wizorek makes a deliberate effort to write in the language of young people. While it is a laudable objective that the author tries to communicate feminist ideas to new audiences, her account of feminism fails to do justice to the complexity of feminist struggles. Her "brief history of feminism in Germany and elsewhere" at the end of the book is very selective. It does not mention the Red Zora or any other group who drew on violent means to fight against gender based violence.

Recent surveys on sexual harassment and the enthusiastic response to Hollaback, #aufschrei, and similar campaigns show that it remains important for women in Germany to break silence that is imposed on them and to speak up against sexualised violence.<sup>v</sup> Yet, a number of recent feminist studies rightly emphasise that silence should not be reduced to powerlessness. Depending on the context, it can have radically different meanings. Róisín Ryan-Flood and Rosalind Gill highlight that "one may silence or be silenced, keep silent out of respect, rage, fear or shame, or even as a mode of resistance" (2010, 1). Since all research involves silence of various kinds, feminist scholars have to pay careful attention to the context in which moments of silence occur in the research process and distinguish between manifestations of restrictive silence (e.g. as a result of censorship or shame) and forms of engaged or

oppositional silence (e.g. during silent vigils or protests). Moreover, we have to be aware of the fact that feminist discourses, too, can marginalise and silence certain views and experiences.

The case of the Red Zora shows that it is far from easy to challenge some of these feminist silences. This discussion of the militant feminist group does not give a comprehensive overview of its history and ideology and could not possibly do so. It is based on data that I have collected in archives, on the internet and by conducting interviews with former group members and feminist activists.<sup>vi</sup> The fact that much of the data that have been collected in archives and in interviews is not disseminated on the internet has reinforced the feminist silence on the Red Zora. Yet, silences in the research process are often unavoidable. To comply with the terms and conditions of the archives used and to protect the safety and privacy of my interviewees, I could use only a part of the gathered information. Rather than acting as a neutral and distant observer of silences in the discourse on militant feminist activism, my research project has thus made me complicit in perpetuating some of these silences. Nevertheless, the activities of the Red Zora can offer critical insights for feminist activism today. So far, the use of digital technologies has hardly challenged the feminist silence on the Red Zora in German feminism. Yet, activists in other countries have begun to document and critically examine the history of the militant feminist group.

### **A Brief Overview of the History and Ideology of the Red Zora**

The Red Zora was formed as a subgroup of the militant leftist network Revolutionary Cells (RC) in the mid-1970s. The first Revolutionary Cell originated 1973 in Frankfurt am Main (Markovits and Gorski 1993, 73). The founding members of the RC wanted to do a few things differently from the Red Army Faction, whose

activities in they had followed closely. As the name indicates, they set out to create a network of loosely connected autonomous revolutionary cells. Members of the RC tried to avoid going underground and participated in a range of local and national protest movements and political subcultures including the antinuclear movement, the squatting scene, and the women's movement. Between 1973 and 1993, the group carried out more than 180 attacks to publicise and assert the demands of these groups and movements and to spread militant protest among their members.

At least a part of the women in the RC identified as feminists, and they took up central themes in the New Women's Movement (for a detailed discussion of the history of the RC and its relation to feminism, see Karcher 2013). Initially operating under the name "Women of the Revolutionary Cell", these women began to plan campaigns with a feminist agenda in the mid-1970s. Their first major attack was a bombing at the Federal Court of Justice in Karlsruhe in March 1975. In their first public statement, the Women of the Revolutionary Cells declared that they had attacked the highest German court to protest against its insistence on the abortion ban. In February 1975, the court had decided that a legal reform of paragraph 218 was incompatible with the sanctity of human life as defined by the constitution (Helwig 1997), although a great part of the population and many politicians supported a decriminalisation of abortion.

In April 1977, militant feminists within the RC committed a first attack under the name "Red Zora". Similar to the bombing in 1975, this attack was directed against an institution that insisted on the abortion ban: the headquarters of the German Medical Association in Cologne. Shortly after the attack, they released a claim of responsibility that featured, for the first time in history, the name and logo of the Red Zora: a Venus symbol perforated from within by the sharp edges of a five-pointing

star with the initials RZ (the logo of the Revolutionary Cells). The name Red Zora refers to a children's book from 1941, which the group saw as a source of inspiration for its politics. Kurt Kläber's novel Die Rote Zora und ihre Bande [translated into English as The Outsiders of Uskoken Castle], which he published under the pseudonym Kurt Held, provided an example of female leadership as the Red Zora envisaged it: the leading character was unconventional, wild and subversive, but also responsible and caring. Equally important for the choice of the name "Rote Zora" was that it had the same initial letters as "Revolutionäre Zellen" [Revolutionary Cells] and indicated the groups' shared ideological and structural principles.

Drawing on radical feminist ideas, the Red Zora argued that the exploitation of women was one of the earliest and most universal forms of oppression and a governing principle in patriarchal structures (Die Früchte des Zorns 1993, 209-211). For several years, the Zoras tried to convince their comrades in the RC that feminist politics had to be put into practice at all levels of the armed struggle, including personal relationships, ideology, structure, tactics and targets. By the early 1980s, most of them had reached the conclusion that many men in the Revolutionary Cells were not willing or able to question their politics and "patriarchal identity" in such a radical way (Die Rote Zora 1993). Another problem for militant feminists in the RC was that they felt solely responsible for "women's issues", while the rest of the group focused on "general" topics. Unable to tackle this gendered division of labour, the Red Zora left the Revolutionary Cells in 1984 to form an independent women's guerrilla. During and even after the separation of the two groups, members of the RC and RZ maintained close relationships and worked jointly on campaigns on several occasions.

As their logo indicates, the founding members of the Red Zora believed that it was legitimate and necessary for women to draw on militant protest to fight against sexist oppression. Looking back on their history, group members explained in 1993:

Personally, we found it tremendously liberating to break with the feminine peaceableness that was imposed on us and to take a conscious decision for violent means in our politics. We experienced that with our actions, we could break through fear, powerlessness and resignation, and we wanted to pass this on to other women/lesbians.<sup>vii</sup> (Die Rote Zora 1993)

Whilst endorsing tactical diversity, the Red Zora clearly placed special emphasis on militant resistance and violent tactics. The group promoted a kind of feminist “counter-violence”.

The issue of counter-violence [Gegengewalt] had been discussed in the West German student movement at least since the publication of Herbert Marcuse’s essay “Repressive Toleranz” [Repressive Tolerance] in 1965. Like Marcuse, Rudi Dutschke and other leading thinkers in the movement considered the use of violence legitimate if it was a response to a greater form of violence, if it was limited to situations in which other means of protest are futile, and if it took the form of a symbolic provocation rather than being an end in itself. Although Dutschke opposed the use of violent tactics in West Germany, he argued that political activists were sometimes left with no other option but to use violence to defend themselves (Dutschke 1967). The murder of the student Benno Ohnesorg by plainclothes policeman on June 2, 1967, an attempt on Dutschke’s life by a right-wing extremist in April 1968 and other events in the late 1960s contributed to the radicalisation of some student activists in West Germany. These men and women took up arms and endorsed a notion of counter-

violence that was not limited to symbolic attacks and that included violence against people.

Contrary to the RAF and other militant leftist groups in West Germany, the RZ focused on small-scale attacks against property and made it a priority not to hurt or kill people in their attacks. According to former group members, their approach to violence was as much the result of personal ethics as of the life-affirming politics of the women's movement.<sup>viii</sup> On the one hand, the RZ set itself the objective to convince other women that it was possible to fight back against everyday violence and abuse. On the other hand, the group wanted to challenge the commonly held view that violent tactics were irreconcilable with feminist politics. The RZ took the stance that violent attacks could serve as a form of "armed propaganda" [bewaffnete Propaganda] for feminist struggles.<sup>ix</sup> Although the Red Zora did not succeed in spreading violent tactics in the New Women's Movement, some of its attacks sparked vivid debates on the scope and limits of feminist protest.

In 1978, the RZ had carried out a series of attacks against sex shops in Koblenz and Cologne. According to a local newspaper, these attacks caused damage worth 200,000 DM (Elendt 1978). With its campaign against the sex industry, the Red Zora sided with anti-porn feminists in the "sex wars" of the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>x</sup> Many feminists in West Germany shared this stance, and some expressed open support for the attacks. A few weeks after the attacks, the feminist magazine EMMA published excerpts of the claim of responsibility. A little cartoon figure next to the text, which had a striking similarity to the chief editor Alice Schwarzer, said: "Help! – I feel overwhelmed with clandestine joy".<sup>xi</sup> Retrospectively, members of the RZ admitted that their protest in the 1970s had failed to consider the views of women

who worked in the sex industry and not paid enough attention to less visible forms of sexism and abuse (Die Rote Zora 1993).

Whilst trying to show solidarity with other women, a number of attacks by the Red Zora reinforced forms of hegemonic speech and silence. In the claim of responsibility for a bombing at the Philippine consulate in Bonn in 1983, the Red Zora accused the Philippine government and other corrupt countries in the Third World of profiting from sex tourism, trafficking and prostitution (Die Früchte des Zorns 1993, 467). The militant feminists declared that they wanted to express solidarity with Philippine women because the sexual objectification of women in the Third World countries constituted an offence against all women, including themselves. By emphasising a shared experience of patriarchal oppression, the Zoras failed to account for the unspoken privileges of their identities.

In December 1993, a group of “old” and “new” Zoras released the brochure Mili’s Tanz auf dem Eis, which provides the first detailed comment on the history of the RZ.<sup>xii</sup> Here, the group stated that discussions with black women, Jewish feminists and lesbian activists had helped them “to understand that there is more than one experience of sexism” (Die Rote Zora 1993). Looking back at their campaigns against sex shops and alleged sex traffickers, the authors acknowledged that their living and working conditions as white and predominantly middle-class women in West Germany were very different from those of many of the women who they were trying to support. Against the background of widespread poverty, political repression and a lack of job opportunities in the Philippines, the Red Zora admitted in 1993 for example, a marriage with German men opened a window of opportunity to many local women.

The militant activism of the Red Zora in the 1980s was not limited to pornography and sex trafficking. The best-known campaign by the group is beyond doubt a series of attacks against the German clothing chain ‘Adler’ in 1987. Since these arson attacks triggered a controversial discussion on the role of violent protest in the German Women’s Movement, I want to discuss them here at least briefly. On May 4, 1986, the Korean Women’s Group in West Berlin received a letter in which women who worked for Adler in South Korea appealed for “sisterly help” from Germany (Kosczy et al. 1988, 61). The plea for help sparked a thriving solidarity campaign in West Germany that involved groups located across the political spectrum. The Korean Women’s Group in Berlin and “Terre des Femmes” activists were the first to respond, with a public relations campaign that mobilised a range of other groups including Christian organizations, radical leftist groups, trade unions and Third World activists. The Adler management rejected criticisms of the appalling working conditions in its South Korean factory, and local authorities ended a strike in April 1987 with violence.

In response to these developments, militant feminists carried out a series of attacks against Adler. In June 1987, the Red Zora planted a bomb at the Adler headquarters in Haibach. In a claim of responsibility, the group presented the attack as an expression of solidarity with striking women workers in South Korea (International Institute of Social History, “Knastarchiv”, Box 23, folder 104, envelope 444). Since the bomb failed to explode, the attack in Haibach did not cause any damage. A few weeks after the failed bombing, the RZ carried out a series of arson attacks against nine Adler stores in West Germany. The fires and sprinkler systems that they activated caused substantial property damage without hurting any employees or customers. According to the Adler management, the company’s loss amounted to



thirty to thirty-five million DM (“Die Rote Zora bezichtigt sich der Anschläge auf Adler” 1987). On September 11, the “Amazons”, an until-then unknown group of militant feminists, followed the example of the “Red Zora” and set fire to an Adler store in Berlin (“Neuer Anschlag auf eine Filiale von Adler in Berlin” 1987). Like the RZ, the “Amazons” used slow-burning incendiary devices to minimise the risk of injury to members of staff or customers (Die Amazonen 1988). In response to the series attacks, the Adler management declared that the company had decided to improve the working conditions in its South Korean factory in order to prevent further attacks (“Neuer Anschlag auf eine Filiale von Adler in Berlin” 1987).

Many participants in the German solidarity campaign criticised that the violent attacks against Adler silenced non-violent voices. In a press release from August 17, the executive board of Terre des Femmes declared: “Actions of that kind discredit the non-violent work of a women’s rights organization that has been in close contact with women workers at the Adler factory in South Korea” (Kosczy et al. 1988, 91). The organization was concerned that the militant protest of the Red Zora would lead to an association of their group and the women’s movement as a whole with violence. Moreover, they expressed the fear that the attacks deflected attention from the situation of the workers. The Korean Women’s Group in Germany took a similar stance. In early September, the organization declared in a public statement: in the “interest of effective and far-reaching educational work [...], we distance ourselves decisively from any recourse to violence to enforce the objectives of unions” (, 95).

An article by the feminist activist and scholar Christa Wichterich argued that the militant protest against Adler imperilled the success of the broader solidarity campaign. Whilst endorsing tactical diversity, Wichterich criticised “voluntaristic actions that jeopardise other forms of resistance” (Wichterich 1987a). It is interesting

that the criticism of Wichterich and other radical feminists did not focus on the violent nature of the attacks, but on their effect on the solidarity campaign. “This firework”, claimed Wichterich, “was a disservice to the attempt to use a single protest campaign to create a triangle of solidarity between workers in the Third World and consumers and workers here. Reason enough to discuss these fiery tactics in the women’s movement” (Wichterich 1987b).<sup>xiii</sup>

With a letter to the editors of the leftist newspaper taz, a radical women’s group from Reutlingen made a critical contribution to this debate. They argued that Wichterich’s article and the Terre des Femmes-statement were “naïve” and divisive. While the authors of the letter agreed that militant protest alone did not make a solidarity campaign, they argued that the Red Zora had made an important contribution to the campaign’s overall success. According to this group, the arson attacks had caused economic harm to Adler and increased the pressure on the company. “Radical resistance on all levels is necessary if we want to put our ideas of a non-hierarchical, non-sexist, non-racist society into practice” (“Bärendienst für wen?” 1987).<sup>xiv</sup> The positive response to the Adler attacks extended far beyond the 1980s. In 2000, the organizers of a workshop at the Humboldt University declared that “the action, which was successful because it forced Adler to meet the demands of the striking women workers, was enthusiastically received in many Tricont countries and was understood as an expression of international solidarity among women” (Veranstaltungsgruppe 23.März 2000).

While international solidarity remained a central theme for the RZ, the group could not repeat the success of the Adler campaign. State authorities responded to the attacks against Adler with a large police operation in December 1987, which led to several arrests and forced many group members into hiding. The following section

discusses the subversive silences and speech acts in feminist responses to the police operation. In the 1990s, things went quiet around the group. On July 24, 1995, the RZ carried out its last attack: a bombing at a shipyard in Hamburg, where a German company produced boats for the Turkish military. In the claim of responsibility, the RZ called for “practical solidarity with the resistance of women in Kurdistan and of Kurdish women here” (Die Rote Zora 1995). For several months, the failed bombing received virtually no attention in feminist circles. One year after the attack, a group of women responded to it with an article in the leftist magazine radikal. Whilst expressing sympathy for the aims and principles of the Red Zora, the authors criticised that the group romanticised life in Kurdish villages and that it should do more to communicate its politics (“Frauen in Kurdistan – Rote Zora” 1996). The RZ, however, was no longer able to act on this request.

### **Silence in the Courtroom**

Adrienne Gerhäuser first caught the attention of German police authorities when purchasing a small travel alarm clock of the type Emes sonochron. In 1986, prosecuting authorities had begun to monitor the sale of these clocks throughout Germany because members of the Red Zora had a preference for alarm clocks of this type as incendiary time fuses. Employees of the Federal Criminal Police Office had confiscated thousands of Emes sonochron alarm clocks in watch businesses all over the country, took them apart and engraved code numbers on the back of the clock faces. They then reassembled the alarm clocks and returned them to the shops, which they equipped with video cameras to collect evidence about every purchase of an alarm clock of this type (“Falsch bombadiert” 1989).

On October 15, 1986, Adrienne Gerhäuser fell into the trap. A police camera captured her buying a marked alarm clock that the Red Zora used as a time fuse in a

bombing a few days later. Due to a technical fault, the bomb at the Institute for Genetic Research in Berlin failed to detonate and was confiscated by police. Not knowing that all clock stores in West Germany were under police surveillance, Gerhäuser purchased another alarm clock in June 1987 that was used in the failed bombing against the Adler headquarters in Haibach in the same month. Born in 1949, Adrienne Gerhäuser completed a degree in German Studies and Political Sciences. In the early 1970s, she moved to Berlin, where she worked as a teacher. She was actively involved in the women's movement and other political projects. In the early 1980s, Gerhäuser moved to Essen, where she completed training as a radio technician. Although her clock purchase had been captured on film, prosecuting authorities were initially not able to identify Gerhäuser because she had no criminal record.

On December 18, 1987, police officers searched thirty-three flats across West Germany as well as the local office of the newspaper taz in Bochum and the office of a small NGO in Essen (“Wer ist, bitteschön, die nächste?” 1988). The aim of the operation was to collect evidence against alleged members of the Red Zora and other militant leftist groups. On that day, the police arrested the journalists Ulla Penselin and Ingrid Strobl. State authorities justified the criminal prosecution of these two women with their interest in “anschlagsrelevante” [attack-related] issues: feminism, genetic engineering and population control. In the case of Ingrid Strobl, the purchase of an Emes sonochron alarm clock was a further cause of suspicion. Like in Gerhäuser's case, Strobl's purchase had been captured on film, and police authorities were able to demonstrate that the purchased alarm clock had been used in a bombing with a feminist agenda. In October 1986, members of the Revolutionary Cells had attacked the headquarters of the German airline Lufthansa in Cologne to protest against sex tourism in the Philippines. According to the RC, Lufthansa offered regular

flights to Manila and Bangkok to German sex tourists, whilst preventing asylum seekers and poor foreigners from travelling to Germany. The proceeding of Strobl and Penselin sparked a wave of solidarity and protests by feminist and leftist activists in West Germany (see, e.g. Schwarzer 1988, 5).

Strobl's crime was not that she actively participated in this or any other attack by the Revolutionary Cells, it was that she had bought the alarm clock that had been used in the attack against Lufthansa and refused to disclose the name of the man for whom she had bought it. According to her lawyer, she refused to cooperate with the authorities for moral reasons ("Falsch bombadiert" 1989). Following Christine (Cricket) Keating, Strobl's decision can be understood as a "silent refusal". According to Keating, a silent refusal is an oppositional form of silence, which "can enable those located in subject positions, who are in some ways privileged, to work against the narratives of self or conventional patters that support hegemonic discourses" (Keating 2013, 27). In the eyes of the court, Strobl's silence demonstrated her support of terrorism. Based solely on the purchase of this alarm clock and of her political journalistic writing, Strobl was sentenced to five years in prison for supporting a terrorist organization ("Erst mal wegschließen" 1990). Although the judgement was overturned on appeal, Strobl had to spend two and a half years in prison before she was released. Penselin, too, refused to cooperate with the authorities. She was released after spending a few months in custody for lack of evidence.

Adrienne Gerhäuser and other suspects on the wanted list of the Federal Criminal Police Office were luckier than Strobl and Penselin: due to a timely warning, they narrowly escaped arrest. According to the journalist Christoph Villinger, the Red Zora enjoyed sympathy way beyond leftist circles. Apparently, several people — including the wife of a detective in Cologne — tried to warn alleged members of the

group about the imminent raid (Villinger 2007; see also Bornhöft 2001). Some say that the state security of the GDR (Stasi) warned Adrienne Gerhäuser's partner Thomas Kram (see, e.g. Marguier 2007). Although these allegations are plausible because the Stasi knew of the raid in advance (Stasi Archive, MfS HA II 25009), there is no hard and fast evidence for these claims. Gerhäuser's friend and comrade Corinna Kawaters was also on the wanted list. After studying Sociology in Bochum, Kawaters has worked as a reporter for the leftist newspaper Die Tageszeitung (taz) in Bochum and as a crime writer. In 1984, she published her first book, the detective novel Zora Zobel findet die Leiche [Zora Zobel finds the dead body] (Kawaters 1984). Two books with same protagonist followed (Kawaters 1986, 2001). On December 18, 1987, the journalist was reporting from an event when colleagues told her that the police were raiding her flat. She left the country hurriedly and without any documents or personal property (Bornhöft 2001).

After spending more than ten years in hiding, Corinna Kawaters returned to Germany in 1998. She was the first woman who stood trial for membership of the Red Zora. In the charges against Kawaters, the Federal Prosecutor referred to her early crime fiction to prove that the defendant had a "closed world-view" and sympathised with the ideas of left-wing terrorism (Ressler 2000). In December 2006, Adrienne Gerhäuser followed her friend's example and surrendered to German police authorities. During her trial in April 2007, she testified that she had been a member of the Red Zora from autumn 1986 until summer 1987 and had purchased two Emes sonochron alarm clocks knowing that they would be used as time fuses. In a statement read out by her lawyer, she declared that she had willingly supported the attacks against the Institute for Genetic Research and against Adler because they expressed her political views at the time. Like Kawaters, Gerhäuser refused to provide details

about the organization and membership of the Red Zora. In its decision, the court acknowledged that the bombings in Berlin and Haibach had not hurt or killed people. Yet, the judges expressed regret that the defendant refused to explain her actions in court. Similar to the conduct of Penselin and Strobl, the silence of Kawaters and Gerhäuser can be understood as a form of silent opposition. Both could leave the courtroom as free women, although they had provided virtually no new information on the history and ideology of the Red Zora. Although the trials against the two women have attracted a considerable amount of media attention, they did not break the feminist silence on the Red Zora in Germany.

### **Towards a Transnational Debate About Militant Feminist Activism**

The rise of new technologies has led to significant developments in the debate on militant feminist activism in Germany that illustrate the profoundly transnational nature of feminist struggles. A first development is that the language of grass-roots activists in Germany has become more militant, and some groups have taken the view that confrontational tactics are imperative to queer and feminist struggles. Interestingly, most militant feminist campaigns in Germany took inspiration from feminist and queer struggles in other countries. Drawing on the fiery language of the Hollaback movement in the US, German activists in Berlin, Dresden and Chemnitz encourage women and girls to “shout back” against street harassment. On their website, the organisers of Hollaback Chemnitz argue that the movement that began in the US has become a global “Kampfansage” to all kinds of harassment — which can be translated as a “challenge” or “declaration of war”. Unlike in the US, in Germany, it is forbidden by law to take photographs of strangers and post them online (Volk 2011). For this reason, reports on the German Hollaback websites do not include any photographs. Interestingly the organisers do not explain this decision on their website,

and they do not mention that, more than 30 years ago, a feminist group in West Germany took pictures to document and promote violent protest against sexualised violence.

While the German Hollaback movement emphasises its commitment to non-violent forms of protest, other activists take the stance that it can be legitimate and necessary to fight back against violence and oppression with violent means. One example is the Berlin-based group “trans\*geniale f\_antifa”, who tries to educate about and campaign against sexism and fascism. On its website, the queer feminist group stresses the importance of remembering women in Jewish partisan movements and other anti-Fascist movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another source of inspiration for the trans\*geniale f\_antifa is the American “Bash Back!” movement. Active from 2007 to 2011, the anarchist network promoted a queer aesthetic and practice of counter-violence. According to a former member, Bash Back can be understood as “a violent set of activities that responds to a primary violence” that was “fluid” and “diffuse” as the violence that queer people experienced in everyday life (Baroque and Eanelli 2011, 412-413). Although the trans\*geniale f\_antifa does not advocate violent tactics on its blog, the logo of the group is a direct reference to queer struggles in the US: it features a knuckleduster and the slogan “bash back”. Considering the group’s active interest in militant activism and in armed struggles, it is interesting that the trans\*geniale fantifa does not even mention the Red Zora.

Should this silence on the Red Zora be seen a sign that the activities of the group are no longer relevant for feminist struggles today? Certainly not. Rather it shows that the active use of new social media by feminist activists does not necessarily challenge silences in feminist movements. Against the background of Germany’s fascist past and political violence in the FRG, feminist activists in



Germany were understandably reluctant to discuss ideas and activities that could associate the women's movement with left-wing "terrorism".<sup>xv</sup> As shown above, Adrienne Gerhäuser, Corinna Kawaters and other former members of the Red Zora have made no public statements about militant feminist activism in West Germany for different reasons. As a result of these silences and a range of other challenges, feminist activists in Germany have only begun to document and discuss the history and ideology of the Red Zora.

A second development in the debate on militant feminist activism in Germany is that political activists in other countries have shown an active interest in the Red Zora and have published their findings online. One of the most detailed discussions of the Red Zora in English to date has been provided by Ann Hansen and Julie Belmas, two former members of the Canadian militant leftist groups "Direct Action" and "The Wimmen's Fire Brigade". Alongside with an overview of their own "guerrilla actions against patriarchal, industrial civilization", Belmas' and Hansen's essay "This is not a Love Story: Armed Struggle Against the Institutions of Patriarchy" provides a "herstory" of the Revolutionary Cells and Red Zora. The document includes a translation of the RZ interview from 1984 and excerpts from several claims of responsibility for the attacks against Adler, which the authors present as the "most comprehensive and successful attack campaign" in the history of the Red Zora (Hansen and Belmas). In his book The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonialization of Everyday Life, George Katsiaficas (1997) goes as far as to argue that the Red Zora could be understood as "the most successful of the various guerrilla groups" in Germany (191). Like Belmas and Hansen's essay, Katsiaficas book is freely available on the internet.

A recent example shows that one does not have to agree with the tactics of the Red Zora to see the activities of this group as a part of the long and varied history of feminist movements and to productively engage with their history. Fifteen years ago, a group of feminist activists organised the first “Red Dawns” [Rdeče zore festival] in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to discuss the challenges that women faced in radical politics, art, and everyday life. Since then, the festival took place annually and has become an important platform for feminist art and queer activism in the Balkans, Western Europe, Turkey and a range of other countries. On their website, the organizers of the festival discuss the history of the Red Zora and state: “Even though Red Dawns festival refrains itself from political violence, it supports *Rote Zora* in their belief that the struggle for women’s rights is undone, that it goes hand in hand with struggles for social justice, and that we cannot be contented with reformist politics” (“Red Dawns Herstory” 2015). The statement by the festival organizers shows that there are feminists who take inspiration from the Red Zora without promoting violence. At a point in time when feminist online campaigns in Germany draw increasingly on the language and tactics of feminist and queer struggles across the world, we could follow the lead of activists in other countries and rekindle the discussion of militant tactics in West German feminism by revisiting the activities of the Red Zora.

### **Biography:**

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<sup>i</sup> Years after its last attack, the RAF still has the capacity to cause controversy nationwide. The 2003 RAF exhibition in Berlin, as well as the release of former group members Brigitte Mohnhaupt (2007) and Christian Klar (2009) from prison, has caused public outcry. The emotionally charged debates on the occasion of the trial of the former RAF member Verena Becker in 2012 provided the most recent evidence that, as regards the RAF, the Germans have yet to come to terms with the past.

<sup>ii</sup> “Unser Traum ist, daß es überall kleine Frauenbanden gibt – wenn in jeder Stadt ein Vergewaltiger, ein Frauenhändler, ein prügelnder Ehemann, ein frauenfeindlicher Zeitungsverleger, ein Pornohändler, ein schweinischer Frauenarzt damit rechnen und sich davor fürchten müßte, daß eine Bande Frauen ihn aufspürt, ihn angreift, ihn öffentlich bekannt und lächerlich macht”, hereinafter translation is mine.

<sup>iii</sup> Source: Stasi Archiv Berlin, MfS HA XXII 5216/8, 288-289.

<sup>iv</sup> “Wenn Du aber diese Gesellschaft mit verändern willst und Diskriminierung dir stinkt, must du dein Schweigen brechen und den Arsch hochkriegen.”

<sup>v</sup> According to a survey from 2004, more than half of the women in Germany have experienced sexual harassment at the workplace or in private life (<http://www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/gleichstellung,did=73018.html>).

<sup>vi</sup> This article draws on data that I have collected for my PhD research project. This data includes archival material from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, the Federal Archives in Koblenz, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, and the Frauenmediatum in Cologne. In addition to these sources, I have carried out interviews with three former members of the Red Zora, and a number of political activists who had been involved in feminist campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>vii</sup> “Wir selbst empfanden das Verlassen der uns zudiktierten weiblichen Friedfertigkeit bzw. die bewußte Entscheidung für gewalttätige Mittel in unserer Politik als ungeheuer befreiend. Wir erlebten, daß wir mit unseren Aktionen Angst, Ohnmacht und Resignation durchbrechen konnten, und wollten dies anderen FrauenLesben weiter vermitteln.” With the term “FrauenLesben” [women/lesbians], the Red Zora used an expression that was common in women’s groups in West Germany. The term was used to draw attention to the fact that the position of women and lesbians was related yet not always identical.

<sup>viii</sup> Interview with three former members of the Red Zora on 17 August 2012.

<sup>ix</sup> Focus group with three former members of the Red Zora on 17 August 2012.

<sup>x</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the feminist sex wars, see: Duggan and Hunter 2006.

<sup>xi</sup> The expression of ‘clandestine joy’ hints at an incident in 1977, when the author of an article in a student magazine in Göttingen expressed ‘clandestine joy’ about the assassination of the attorney general of Germany Siegfried Buback by members of the Red Army Faction.

<sup>xii</sup> Literally translated ‘Mili’s Tanz auf dem Eis’ means ‘Mili’s dance on the ice’. The German title is a play on words. It illustrates the group’s intention to draw on and simultaneously break with the leftist notion of ‘militancy’. The choice of title reflects the authors’ belief that feminist militancy is a tricky affair that requires a lot of practice and involves slippages and tumbles.

<sup>xiii</sup> “Das Feuerwerk hat dem Versuch, in einer einzelnen Widerstandsaktion ein solidarisches Dreieck zwischen Arbeiterinnen in der Dritten Welt, Konsumentinnen hier und Arbeiterinnen hier aufzubauen, einen Bärendienst erwiesen. Anlaß genug, um sich mit der feurigen Taktik in der Frauenbewegung auseinanderzusetzen.”

<sup>xiv</sup> “Radikaler Widerstand auf allen Ebenen auch international ist notwendig, wenn wir unsere Ideen von einer herrschaftsfreien, nichtsexistischen, nichttrassistischen Gesellschaft ernsthaft durchsetzen wollen.”

<sup>xv</sup> In the 1970s, police authorities and journalists have repeatedly presented female members of left-wing terrorist groups in West Germany as feminists. Yet, Vojin Saša Vukadinović rightly emphasises that the prominent role of feminism in terrorism discourses in the 1970s had more to do with a ‘systematic anti-feminism of state, science, clergy and the media’ than with the political stance of women in the RAF (Vukadinović 2010: 54-55). In a similar vein, Dominique Grisard argues that anti-feminist, anti-terrorist and racist discourses at the time intersected and jointly produced an image of the female terrorist as the antithesis to the white heterosexual male citizen (Grisard 2011: 13).